

Ohio State University Commencement Address
Presented by
Ohio Senate President
Stanley J. Aronoff
December 7, 1990

President Gee, distinguished faculty, new Ohio State graduates, proud parents, friends, and guests.

My congratulations to you the graduating class. You deserve the pride that your family feels in you today as well as your own sense of accomplishment.

I am honored to be the first commencement speaker at Ohio State under the new leadership of President E. Gordon Gee. From the 5th President of the Ohio Senate to the 11th President of the Ohio State University, I extend a warm welcome to Dr. Gee and extend my best wishes to him and his family as he begins, what I know will be, a successful and prosperous era for Ohio State University. I even bought a bowtie to usher in the "Gee Era".

President Gee believes that public universities are going to play a particularly important leadership role...both nationally and internationally...in our rapidly changing world. Recently he said:

"Universities are the place where ideas are created, then taught and, more importantly, debated. What we need right now, in this country particularly, are good ideas. Universities represent the one commodity that we have in which ideas are born and debated, and from those ideas we can develop a sense of our common fabric and our civic future."

It is that future which you begin today. Of course, I know you won't make the mistake that I made at graduation when I said: "Here I am world. I have my A.B.!"

The world answered back: "Sit down, young man, and I'll teach you the rest of the alphabet!"

Ohio State has been your world for these past several years. There have been stresses and pressures, but mostly it's been a comfortable existence--studying, meeting friends on the Oval, strolling past Mirror Lake on a sunlit afternoon. Except for the memories and occasional reunions, and football Saturdays, this is the day you leave all that behind and experience the rest of the alphabet.

Your lives will be shaped by things that occur far beyond this campus in Columbus. Americans are becoming more and more dependent on people they do not know and on places they have not been. We are indeed citizens of a global community and going to places such as the European Community, the emerging republics, the Pacific Rim and the Caribbean Rim may be as commonplace as a trip to Ann Arbor for the Michigan game.

In a way, you are prepared for a global existence because of your university experience. Ohio State is the largest university in the country--with a total enrollment of more than 58,000--and where nearly 53,000 of you have met on a daily basis to receive your education right here on the Columbus campus--you have been given a head start in learning how to live in a diverse community--for OSU truly represents a microcosm of our world today. Survival in a large campus is not easy, but it gives you a great jump start.

Today you will receive your degree from what has become the state's flagship university--The Ohio State University--an institution which serves as the state's leading center for teaching, research and public service. And as the primary research and graduate education center in Ohio, OSU has offered you a comprehensive curriculum--a curriculum of nearly 8,000 courses--a curriculum that only a handful of universities in the world can match.

In addition, Ohio State is in the middle of what some people consider the "new silicon valley" with the Ohio Supercomputer Center located on the Columbus campus. This center boasts the fastest and most advanced supercomputer known to man.

Ohio State continues to dominate the Ohio Eminent Scholars Program, a program established to recognize the strongest graduate and research programs at state universities. And for those of you who may now know it, Ohio State received six of the nine Eminent Scholars positions awarded by the Ohio Board of Regents this past June. Through the grants established by this program, the university

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is able to bring the brightest and best in their field to teach at Ohio State. And you should be proud of the fact that since the inception of this program in 1983, Ohio State has won a total of 17 out of the 37 Eminent Scholars positions awarded--more than any other state school.

And Ohio State has never lost sight of its land grant mission to provide broad higher educational opportunities on the basis of ability rather than means or privilege.

This is a memorable day in your life. A day mixed with relief and pride. A day to reflect on your achievements, your hopes and your fears.

What a day to be graduating!

For most Americans, December 7 is remembered as Pearl Harbor Day. The day when, in 1941, a sneak attack on our military and naval base in Hawaii brought the United States into World War II. "A day that will live in infamy," said President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the oft-quoted line from his War Message to Congress. We do tend to remember the spectacularly bad over the unspectacularly good.

How many of you remember December 7 as Delaware Day? (Outside the state of Delaware that is) Well Delaware Day was the beginning of the ratification of the United States Constitution. On December 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to approve the basic document under which our nation is still governed. It marked the beginning of the end of the concept of the divine right of kings.

In place of the absolutism of monarchy, the freedoms flowing from this document created a land of opportunities. So December 7 should be remembered as the start of opportunity for you grounded in the foundation of freedom.

Just two weeks ago, another document for hope, freedom and liberty was adopted. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed recently at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe may be the most important document forged in Europe in 200 years. The Charter calls for all countries that choose to sign it, to carry out a form of government well-known to all Americans.

Does this sound familiar?

"We undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations...We affirm that, without discrimination, every individual has the right to: freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly."

Europe is codifying what we have taken for granted, and in time, this document will change the face of Europe as dramatically as our Constitution and Bill of Rights did when they were adopted in America.

Unfortunately, the significance of this event, proclaiming democracy as Europe's choice of government, was overshadowed by events in the Persian Gulf. Sadly, troops in the desert film better than the development of ideas.

You graduate at a time when negativism and skepticism crash "head on" into hope and promise; when we criticize the institutions that made us great at the same time the rest of the world is embracing our beliefs; when the 30-second TV attack or sound byte overpowers the great books and ideas. We have helped create the dichotomy. Your job will be to sort it out.

And while you're sorting things out, I hope you won't fall for every negative prediction. We all know that the New Madrid Fault will cause a major earthquake some time in history. But how many of us bought the prediction that it would occur on December 3, 1990.

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Well here we are on December 7, 1990, and the "Big One" did not occur. But millions of us now have earthquake insurance. Maybe there are some things in nature we just can't control...including human nature.

On the other hand, there are things that you can control-- or at least help and maybe that's where you should focus your attention and your talents. Take the drug problem, the environment, energy dependence, the economy, education, health, and many more... we need your enthusiasm and your help.

It may be unsettling to leave the security and comfort of your families and your homes for an uncertain future in a time of rapid change. That is a great responsibility, and it can be an intimidating one. But what an opportunity!

Never did I, nor most of my generation, believe that we would live to see the events which have taken place over the past year and a half. The demise of the Berlin Wall, and, a united Germany that just last week held its first, free all-German election since 1932. And the shouts of freedom echoing throughout the former Soviet satellites in Warsaw, Budapest, East Berlin, Sofia, and Prague, the Common Market, the emerging Third World countries, and Tiananmen Square.

These are living examples that communism and tyranny are crumbling and that human beings cherish freedom. At the same time you cannot be immune to the problems you see around you-- perhaps too close to home: the homeless, the disabled, the elderly, and the desperate.

Although it may be difficult to begin your journey into such an unsettled world, and at a time we so often are examining our own failing, these events should serve as a reminder that the rest of the world looks to you for leadership and understanding.

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This is your day--a day for which you have all worked so hard--a day that surely seemed it would never arrive--and a day that will soon be over before you know it.

It is my hope that you will find the time to clear the static that comes from negativism, the time to find what is right with the world, the time to appreciate the good in your lives, and the time to dedicate at least part of your life to the happiness of others.

"Become a possibilitarian," said a modern theologian. "No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see the possibilities--always see them, they're there." That is my challenge to you. I hope you will accept it.